

Is this normal?
**Identifying Mental Health Problems in
 Teens and What to do Next**

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OUTLINE

- Biopsychosocial development
- Prevalence rates
- Recognizing the signs and symptoms
- What *is* normal?
- What is *abnormal*?
- Helping your child “thrive,” not just “survive”
- How and where to seek support
- References and resources
- Questions

**BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
 THE TEEN IN CONTEXT**

Biological underpinnings:

- **Neurobiology**
 - Pruning (decrease in gray matter), Myelination (increase in white matter) = psychiatric illness can form
 - Lower levels of dopamine but higher release amounts = novelty seeking, risk taking
 - Limbic system = increased emotional sensitivity (teens feel emotions 30x more intense than adults, teens see emotion when none is present)
- Sexual maturation
- Genetic predisposition

Psychological factors:

- Heavily influenced by biology in adolescence
- Trauma
- Personality/Temperament
- Stressors: school, sports, college entrance, social media

Social factors:

- Identity vs. Role confusion
- Peers over parents
- Peer pressure (social membership is prioritized over morality)

HOW COMMON ARE THESE DISORDERS?

Depression = 11.4% (2.8 million) adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the US had at least one major depressive episode in the past year

Anxiety = 25.1 % adolescents aged 13 to 18, 5.9% met criteria for severe anxiety

Substance use = variable based on substance (see following slides)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/major-depression-among-adolescents.shtml>
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-anxiety-disorder-among-children.shtml>
<http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FRR1-2014/NSDUH-FRR1-2014.htm#fidtextanchor007>

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVALENCE

SAMHSA 2014 Substance Use Data, Ages 12 - 17		
Substance	Use	Use Disorder
All illicit	9.4%	3.5%
Alcohol	11.5% Binge drinking: 6.1% Heavy drinking: 1%	2.7%
Marijuana	7.4%	2.7%
Tobacco	7%	--
Pain Relievers	1.9%	0.7%
Cocaine	0.2%	0.1%
Heroin	0.1%	0.1%
Hallucinogens	0.5%	--
Inhalants	0.6%	--
Stimulants	0.7%	--

DEPRESSION SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Unusual, persistent sadness
- Reduced interest in activities
- Change in appetite/eating habits, involuntary changes in weight
- Shifts in sleep patterns
- Sluggishness
- Harsh self-assessment
- Irritability
- Loss of interest
- Low energy or motivation
- Feeling worthless, hopeless, guilty
- Difficulty concentrating, change in grades
- Thoughts of or attempts at suicide
- Somatic complaints

ANXIETY SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Excessive worry about future, others, & different life areas
- Avoiding particular situations/settings
- Physical complaints
- Sleep disturbance
- Clingy behavior
- Extreme tiredness
- Lack of concentration
- Being easily startled
- Irritability
- Inability to relax
- Somatic complaints

SUBSTANCE USE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- A change in friends
- A sudden need for privacy
- Increased need for money, stealing
- Messy, careless personal appearance
- Secretive phone calls or text messages that seem to be in code
- Lack of interest
- Drop in grades, or failure to show up at school at all
- Irritability, increased conflict with others
- Change in appetite, sleep, somatic complaints

<https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/substance-abuse/signs-and-symptoms-of-teen-drug-use/>

WHAT IS NORMAL?

FACTS, it is normal for teenagers to:

- Engage in some high risk behaviors:
 - Drug experimentation
 - Sexual activity
 - Reckless driving
 - Skipping school to hang out with friends
- Irritable, "moody"
- "Drama" with friends
- "Peers over parents," increased parent-child conflict
- Oversleeping, messy room

WHAT IS ABNORMAL?

FACT: Adolescence is time when psychiatric disturbances arise

Ask yourself:

- Is it impacting their quality of life or functioning?
- Is it negatively impacting their self-respect or causing emotional harm?
- Are they engaging in life-threatening behaviors?
- Are behaviors causing conflict with friends or family?

"THRIVING" NOT JUST "SURVIVING"

- Radically accept this is where your child is at AND it's scary as a parent to witness your child's difficult experiences/behaviors
- Open conversation & communication
- Validation
 - "I hear you..." **NOT** "I agree with you..."
 - See "Six Steps of Validation: A Key to Healthy Families" on CFJCounseling.com/blog
- Contingency planning to foster developmental growth
 - Non-punitive
 - Democratic
 - Behavior-based
 - Outline & discussion of natural consequences and rewards

SEEKING SUPPORT

- Early intervention is key
- School counselor
- Local licensed therapist (LPC, LCSW, LMFT, LCDC)
PsychologyToday.com
- Counseling center in the community (accredited, licensed staff)
- Helplines:
 - The Crisis Text Line: 741741
 - If emergency, call 911
 - The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Child Mind Institute | ChildMind.Org
 MentalHealth.gov | Provides one-stop access to U.S. government mental health and mental health problems information.
 National Institute of Mental Health | NIMH.NIH.gov
 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline | 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
 SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline | 1-877-SAMHSA7 (1-877-726-4727)
 SAMHSA and NIMH Partner to Support Early Intervention for Serious Mental Illness (June 14, 2014)
 American Psychological Association - Children and Mental Health:
<http://www.apa.org/pi/families/children-mental-health.aspx>
 The Gottman Institute | Gottman.com

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QUESTIONS? THOUGHTS?

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